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He, being Dead, yet Speaketh.

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THIS Report of the memorable address delivered by the late Bishop of Winchester to the Rural Deans of the Diocese at Winchester House, July 15, 1873, has been carefully prepared by comparison of notes taken at the time. It is printed in compliance with the earnest desire of many who were present, and many more who were absent, that the last counsels of Bishop Wilberforce should not be lost to the Church.

At the close of the conference, in reply to the unanimous and earnest request of the assembled clergy, the Bishop consented to write out and print what he had spoken, if while it was still in his memory he could possibly find time for the purpose. Four days afterwards the end came, and he rested from all his labours.

It would have been more satisfactory if the Bishop's unfulfilled design could have been carried out by the issue of a more authoritative record of his address. But as there seems to be no such hope, the following report is now printed for private circulation, as a substantially accurate representation of an address, which is not more deeply interesting as the latest utterance of our departed father in God, than it is valuable for the wise and loving and loyal counsels which it gives for our guidance in these perilous times.

It has been the aim throughout this report to preserve the very words recorded in the notes, rather than to run the risk of sacrificing accuracy by presenting them in a more studied form.

I do not doubt, my reverend brethren, that the extreme views and extreme practices which are springing up around us, are as much a source of regret to you as to myself. In bringing the subject before you to-day, I am acting against the advice of some whom I greatly respect. But I have thought it the most manly and straightforward course, to face the question and take counsel with you as to the mode in which it is most desirable to deal with these things.

I. Great prominence is given to the subject of *Confession*. The tendency of the doctrine now put forward on this subject is to exalt the use of Confession into a necessity of the Christian life. Now I have no doubt in my own mind what is the true teaching of the Church of England on this point. It is that Christ has lodged with His Church the power of absolution by the Word, the Sacraments, and the Ministry : these are the ordinary means of relieving the sins and sorrows of His people, and conveying the assurance of pardon to the penitent. Then in

particular cases, for souls specially burdened with sin, besides this primary doctrine laid down and insisted upon by our great Reformers, there is a direction to make particular Confession, as the mode of obtaining relief.

But this is an essentially different doctrine from that which it is now sought to establish, viz., that habitual Confession is almost necessary for the leading of the higher Christian life. This leads on rapidly to the old habit of believing that private Confession of sin before the great High Priest is insufficient, and that without Confession to a priest a man cannot be sure of pardon, and especially cannot draw near to God in the Holy Sacrament.

Now of this I will say that this system of Confession is one of the worst developments of Popery. In the first place, as regards *the penitent*, it is a system of unnatural excitement, a sort of spiritual dram-drinking, fraught with evil to the whole spiritual constitution. It is nothing short of the renunciation of the great charge of a conscience which God has committed to every man—the substitution of Confession to man for the opening of the heart to God—the adopting in every case of a remedy only adapted to extreme cases which can find relief in no other way.

Then in *families*, it introduces untold mischief. It supersedes God's appointment of intimacy between husband and wife, father and children; substituting another influence for that which ought to be the nearest and closest, and producing reserve and

estrangement where there ought to be perfect freedom and openness.

And lastly, as regards *the person* to whom Confession is made, it brings in a wretched system of casuistry. But far worse than this, it necessitates the terrible evil of familiar dealing with sin, specially with sins of uncleanness, thereby sometimes even tending to their growth, by making the horrible particulars known to those who have hitherto been innocent of such fatal knowledge, and so poisoning the mind of priest and people alike. A fact which has of late been very painfully brought home to me.

II. To turn to *Ritual*. There is great danger in men going on to add ceremony to ceremony, and introducing, by little and little, practices which, before the Reformation, were connected with great spiritual errors. This danger is, that the outcome of errors cannot be restored without the errors themselves coming in likewise. People can see this readily enough, and therefore these things give great offence. They alarm those who are jealous of our position as a Church protesting against Romish corruptions. This offence is great and real. But at the same time this seems a lower ground than we ought to take in dealing with the question; we are not so much to consult the feelings of those who take offence, as to regard the simple issue, "What is the truth of God in this matter? and how are we to deal with those who take, as we believe, distorted views of it?"

III. Another great evil is the effect of these ex-

treme views upon the *tone of preaching*. They tend to produce a one-sided preaching: a preaching which exalts the corporate religion of the Church, rather than the individual life of each soul which desires to draw near to God. The natural result is, to deaden the internal and deeply spiritual part of the public ministry.

These are, to my mind, manifest evils and dangers. But, in dealing with them, be careful not to be *unfair*. Nothing is ever gained by unfairness. There is no good in it, but much evil. There is this evil, that it produces a reaction; and, therefore, using strong language just helps forward the cause against which it is directed. Do not let us deal with Confession as if there were no such thing as the opening of a soul to a fellow-creature, or to a minister of the Gospel, with a view to obtaining relief under a special burden of sin, by a ministry specially appointed for the purpose. Do not let us forget, in dealing with extravagances of Ritual, that many of these extreme practices have been developed out of the depths of earnestness on the part of those who have introduced them; that this growth of error is connected with a remarkable revival of religious life; that the men who have led the way in this movement are living devoted lives, self-sacrificing lives, are themselves living near to God; and that the movement is associated with the height and depth of their own love. But, as a natural consequence, their lead has been taken up and followed by lower men, catching up the echoes of their holiness, and uttering a

cuckoo cry for things which others have elaborated out of their own spiritual experience.

Nor, again, let us lose sight of the fact, that this religious movement has been marked by a great increase of public services, public prayers, and celebrations of the Holy Communion; by greater reverence for holy things, a stronger desire to realize the presence of Christ in His Church, a fuller appreciation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and a more distinct belief in His work on earth—not, perhaps, so much in His action upon individual souls, as in His presence in His Church, acting through the channel of its ordinances.

The whole subject which I have felt it my duty to bring before you this day is one which costs me the greatest anxiety, and gives me perpetual sorrow of heart. The life of a Bishop in these days is embittered by this question coming up again and again: “How to resist the rapid growth of these errors without falling into the snare of putting back the inner life which exists beneath?”

Remember, that all errors which have spread and become formidable rested upon some truth. If not, they could not for a moment survive the light of day or the light of discussion. So the history of error is always the same. First, the *outcoming* of a truth; then, the *exaggeration* of that truth; lastly, the *distortion* of that truth. If there were no truth in it, no earnest man could be misled by it. But, from the fact of a truth underlying the error, two conclusions follow:—First, there is a danger in

receiving it, lest you encourage the error in cherishing the truth. Secondly, there is a danger in resisting it, lest you resist the truth in discountenancing the error.

Now, whenever there has been a development of the spiritual life—frequently running on into error, yet still a development of *life*—whenever there has been a struggling after some truth which has been left behind, and which is perceived in the distance—men's minds will begin to be moved towards it. And, in all such cases, the history of the Church shows that *simple repression* has only done harm. At one time it has checked the spiritual life itself; at another time it has simply alienated the people in whom that life was stirring. Sometimes it has caused the loss of the great awakening; sometimes it has hardened it into a heresy.

Take the history of Wesleyanism. In a day of general languor and spiritual death, there was an outbreak of life and zeal. What was the policy adopted by the Church in that great juncture and crisis of her history? Instead of welcoming and guiding the movement, as the awakening of a new spiritual life within her own bosom, her policy was that of simple repression. Extinguish Wesleyanism! It was from the first a hopeless effort! It just succeeded so far as to cut off from the Church a great revival, and to deaden its own spiritual life; to lose an earnest protest against the dreary system of wretched morality which was then set forth and preached instead of the reality of gospel life.

Well, then, if we are to profit at all by the lessons of the past, this is the first warning. It shows what is the duty of all thinking men in reference to a new awakening of spiritual life. Though the movement seem to be dangerous, do not simply *repress* it, do not simply *extinguish* it : rather ask how you may best keep alive the vitality which is in it, and so guide and control it as to make it help in raising the spiritual life of the whole Church.

It is easy to say, Let there be an iron rule : use no kindly words : put it down. This is the language of the world. This is the language of the "Times." "Don't let us be troubled with such a movement as this. Sit upon it : smother it : never mind what hearts you may break in the process : never mind what discouragement you may cast upon some fallen woman struggling to rise into a better life : some young man seeking the help of a wise and loving hand to raise him from the gulf which yawns before him. Never mind all this. Put it down. Let us have a decent untroubling unity which shall be diversified only by its intense breadth. Let there be room for every sort of negation. Let the laity believe in anything or nothing, and let the services be such that none can be offended."

This is the language of the world. But what is the voice of Christ? What is the mind of his Spirit? Surely, something very different from this. Surely, it would bid us to deal tenderly with

everything in which *life* is : to see where the error lies, where it begins, and to separate the error from the truth. These men, loving Christ as they do, cannot we draw them with us to see more as we see? to unite in a common acknowledgment of one Lord, one faith?

The first is an easy process, and the second is hard. I have found it no easy matter to maintain this, which I hold to be the only unassailable position in the present controversy. I am attacked on all sides. On the one side I am called a false friend, accused of betraying a cause which I once upheld : on the other, I am said to be unfaithful to my own church, and a concealed Papist. I cannot say that I do not feel such attacks. It is impossible not to be pained by them. Of course one feels it, and cannot but feel it. It is hard to bear; but after all it is *nothing* when weighed against the testimony of one's own conscience; it is *nothing* to make one recede from the course which one believes to be right, or to shake one's resolution by God's help to maintain it.

Well then, if we ought to endeavour to draw these men to us, and lead them with us, instead of repelling them from us and thereby confirming their errors, my advice to you is this.

First, in regard to Confession. (1) Be distinct in your declaration against *enforced* Confession to a priest. Testify against it, whether as enforced by rule or only by influence.

(2) Declare distinctly against the *frequent*

repetition of Confession; anything like the habit of periodical Confession.

(3) Be distinct in repudiating the notion of Confession as *necessary*: as if pardon is not as complete and full to him who confesses to God, as to him who confesses to man; or as if there is not as certain forgiveness to be found in the real and heart-felt acknowledgments of the General Confession, followed by the General Absolution, as in any private confession and particular declaration of pardon.

But, on the other hand, do not deny or ignore the truth that the Reformers did maintain and hand down to us the doctrine that there is a ministry of reconciliation, specially committed by Christ Himself to His ministers for such as cannot otherwise find peace and comfort. That those who cannot quiet their own conscience may come and open their grief to the minister of the Word of Christ, believing that the grace of the Holy Spirit will through that ministry relieve and establish their burdened soul.

Secondly, in regard to Ritualistic observances. There is a growing desire to introduce novelties, such as incense, a multitude of lights in the chancel, and so on. Now these and such things are honestly and truly alien to the Church of England. Do not hesitate to treat them as such. All this appears to me to indicate a fidgety anxiety to make everything in our churches assimilate to a foreign usage. There is a growing feeling, which I can only describe as an "ashamedness" of the

Anglican Church, as if our grand old Anglican communion contrasted unfavourably with the Church of Rome. The habitual language held by many men sounds as if they were ashamed of our Church and its position; it is a sort of apology for the Church of England as compared with the Church of Rome. Why I would as soon think of apologizing for the virtue of my mother to a harlot! I have no sympathy in the world with such a feeling. I abhor this fidgety desire to make everything un-Anglican. This is not a grand development, as some seem to think. It is a decrepitude. It is not something very sublime and impressive, but something very feeble and contemptible.

At the same time, there is such a thing as a legitimate thirst and desire for a higher ritual and a more majestic service. Do not ignore this. Let it be seen that you know and understand what it is that they want, and that if this is all they need not go out of our own Church to get it. Do not aim at carrying the opposite views to their extreme development as a protest against the Romanizing views which you condemn. Do not deny that which is legitimate; only deny the excess.

Remember that every development in the direction of Puritanism (I use the word not in an offensive sense, but only to designate a class of doctrines) is playing the game of the ultra-Ritualists. I take this opportunity of thanking the clergy for the manner in which they have received my suggestion with regard to the use of the surplice in the pulpit

during the morning service. Their action in this matter has been very general in the direction of my advice, and has tended greatly to union.

One thing more. Avoid all *bitterness* of language or of spirit in dealing with those from whom you differ. Remember that the one thing which helps forward infidelity more than anything else is the division which exists amongst believers, and the bitterness which is often engendered by it. Men are scandalized especially by the bitterness shown in religious newspapers, and in speeches at religious meetings. They say, "See how ready they all are to tear one another to pieces. It is only the accident of the Establishment which keeps them together. Among all these conflicting views and sects what are we to believe and follow?"

Therefore my advice is—deal gently with your opponents—try to understand them—raise the standard of worship—get rid of *badges*—let there be no parties but the two ultimate extremes.

The remainder of this address was delivered in the course of a free discussion of the various topics of which it treats, hence it assumes a somewhat discursive and parenthetical form.

With regard to the position of the celebrant at the altar, the Bishop said: If a churchwarden presented his clergyman for consecrating with his back to the people, he would obtain a conviction. Whatever distinction may be alleged in the Purchas case, between a decision '*in personam*,' and '*in rem*,' I

am persuaded that anyone brought before the Ecclesiastical Courts for adopting this position would be condemned. This being the only authoritative decision that we have of the law on this question, it appears to me to be worthy of serious consideration : first, whether we are not bound to submit to this declaration of the present state of the law ; and, secondly, whether this is not one of those cases in which we are called to make a sacrifice to secure unity.

Fasting Communion. It is difficult to estimate the mischief which is resulting from the action of the High Ritualistic party in this matter. It is true that nothing can be more important than coming to the Holy Communion with the whole heart and soul in a proper frame for giving undivided attention to the services. Fatigue, distractions, fulness of food, all tend to destroy the benefit of the ordinance.

This is one reason of the strong objection which I feel to *Evening Communion*. But not the only reason, for it appears to me that the will of God, as laid down by St. Paul in writing to the Corinthian Church, plainly condemns the practice. Since that time it has never been heard of in the Christian Church till within the last fifty years. With that instinctive sense of what is right which often takes the place of a written law, it has been practically abandoned in every after age. This is a case in which the exception proves the rule. In the African Church it was permitted on one day, and one only—that was on the day of the institution of the Sacra-

ment. But then, mark what was the preparation for it—every one had to bring a certificate of having fasted the whole day till evening. To make a custom of coming to the Holy Communion satiated with food, and distracted by the day's events, is one of the most dangerous innovations on the rule of our Church. There is not one of our great Reformers who does not witness against it either directly or indirectly. I leave those who are already compromised in this matter to do what they feel to be right; but I beg of all in the diocese who have not already committed themselves to this habit not to begin it.

It is not in a light sense that I say this new doctrine of Fasting Communion is dangerous. (1.) The practice is not advocated because a man comes in a clearer spirit and less disturbed body and mind, able to give himself entirely to prayer and communion with his God; but on a miserable degraded notion that the consecrated elements will meet with other food in the stomach. It is a detestable materialism. Philosophically, it is a contradiction, because when the celebration is over you may hurry away to a meal, and the process about which you were so scrupulous immediately follows. The whole notion is simply disgusting. (2.) The Patristic quotations by which the custom is supported are misquotations. S. Chrysostom's saying on the subject applies to the full mid-day meal, not to the light repast of our ordinary breakfast. It is put on the moral grounds that after a feast there will be fulness, and during a

feast there will be jesting and talking, all which constitute a moral unfitness for so high a ceremonial. (3.) Then what a dangerous consequence results in *non-communicating attendance*. Pressed not even for physical reasons, it brings us back to the great abuse of coming to the sacrament to be spectators instead of partakers, and so we have the condition of things arising in our communion which already prevails in the Church of Rome. I heard of a Roman Catholic priest triumphing greatly in the fact that he had *two male* communicants. I went to the Church of the Madeleine, in Paris, at 5.30 a.m., several times, in order to observe what was the practice. It was always the same thing, the priest communicating alone, or one or two women occasionally joining him—the whole attendant congregation satisfied to remain looking on.

That this custom is creeping into our Church is not an accident; neither is it brought in for the purpose of making children better acquainted with the service. That would be a great help. I have found the benefit of it myself when my own father used to take me to church and leave me in his seat to read hymns which he had selected for me, while he himself communicated. That, I say, was to me a very great help. But this is recommended under quite a different impression. It is under the idea that prayer is more acceptable at this time of the sacrifice; that you can get benefit from being within sight of the sacrament when it is being administered. It is the substitution of a semi-materialistic presence

for the actual presence of Christ in the soul of the faithful communicant. It is an abomination, this teaching of non-communicating attendance as a common habit. It is a corollary on the practice of fasting communion. If you cannot fast till mid-day, and must not communicate without fasting, then you are to be present and expect the benefit, though you do not comply with the conditions of the sacrament. Thus the Roman theory is creeping in. The sacrificing priest stands between your soul and your God, and makes atonement for you. Fasting till the mid-day communion is irritation of the nerves unfitting you to partake in this holy office. Come to early communion, as giving the first of the day, the freshness of the spirit, the unbrokenness of the heart to that great service. But if you cannot come in the morning, have no scruple about taking ordinary food before you communicate.

Discussion arose, and the Bishop subsequently said :

You will observe that I have not given any instruction to drop the custom of evening communion where it has been already adopted. This shows that I do not consider the matter a simple one ; but I do think the practice highly inexpedient. If it is said that some find it very salutary and helpful, I answer that the same might be said of much of Popery. It is not a question of the individual benefit which may accrue in certain cases ; but the question is, what will be the effect upon the Church if the custom becomes general ? What will be the state of things

fifty years hence? It is now said to be for the convenience of the poor, will it be for their convenience then? I think not. I think it will become the resort of the indolent and self-indulgent. Half the population will be choosing this as the convenient time, and I believe that it will greatly lower the reverence in which the Holy Sacrament is held. At Peckham, evening communion was changed to early communion, and in a year and a half not one communicant had been lost, and the whole number had doubled itself. After stating my opinion on this subject freely and openly, I leave my clergy to their free action in this matter. With regard to non-communicating attendance, I consider that when you have partaken of an early morning communion, there can be no danger or impropriety in your being present at the later celebration without communicating.

THE END.





